## Strategies Which Promote Parent - Professional Partnerships in Schools

## Know this about parents...

- Are replacing their dreams about their child with the realities of another
- May be experiencing a range of emotions including love, joy, compassion, motivation, concern, loss, denial, blame, anger, fear, anxiety, sadness, depression, grief, guilt
- Are looking for answers
- Often feel isolated and alone; as if they were the only family who has a child with a disability
- Realizes their child's disability impacts the entire family
- Are often receiving a multitude of conflicting advice from a variety of people
- Come with cultural beliefs and attitudes about their child with a disability
- Are often not aware of special education services, Section 504 Plans, or other services or laws that might help their child
- Want to be equal partners and part of the solution, not part of the problem
- Need to learn to take time for themselves
- Want to talk
- Often need someone just to listen
- May have a disability themselves

## What Works: Principles of Family/Professional Collaboration for Partners

1. Promote relationships in which professionals and families work together.

The focus begins with and remains on the child.

- Share in advance meeting dates, times, and who will be in attendance
- Share information on the draft IEP in advance (no surprises!), encourage parental input
- Issue a warm greeting
- Hold meetings in an accessible and comfortable location
- Plan enough meeting time
- Educate parents about their role in the IEP
- Begin the meeting with positive things about the student and parent
- Avoid professional jargon and acronyms
- Share and celebrate victories!
- Express appreciation
- Recognize the knowledge, skills and experience both the family and professionals bring to the relationship.

Educators	Parents
The school specialist	The home specialist and child specialist
Selected your chosen field	Did not choose to have a child with a disability and are replacing their dream about their child with another and seeking information that will help
Received knowledge through formal education and job experience	Asking and seeking information on an ongoing basis. Information comes through life experiences, people's advice, workshops, conferences, reading, and the internet
Understand the special education system	Have to understand multiple systems throughout the child's life
Knowledgeable about what helps children with disabilities in the school system	Knowledgeable about their child, what helps and what has worked

- Acknowledge that the development of trust is an integral part of a collaborative relationship.
  - Be aware of unequal relationships
  - Treat everyone with respect
  - Be accessible provide your contact information, when and how you would prefer to be contacted (email, phone, visit, note)
  - Assure the parent that confidentiality will be maintained and then do it
  - Seek to understand the other person's point of view



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- Base trust on facts not emotion
- Wipe the board clean -do not dwell on past history
- Express interest
- Act non-judamentally
- Admit mistakes
- 4. Facilitate open communication so that families and professionals feel free to express themselves.
  - Ask questions. "Can you describe for me ... ", "Will you share with me ..... Ask parents to share relevant information about their child

  - Validate stated feelings. "So you feel that ... ", "I sense you are feeling... "
    Listen for content not delivery, do not be afraid of emotions

  - Don't be threatened by knowledgeable, assertive parents; make use of the parent's expertise
  - Clarify information, check your assumptions. "Let me see if I understand...?"
  - Express concerns and feelings. "I am concerned about ... ", "I feel good about ... "
  - Explain the rationale for your decision
  - Be non-judgmental, use "I" statements
- 5. Create an atmosphere in which the cultural traditions, values and diversity of families are acknowledged and honored.
  - Develop competency in cross-cultural beliefs and communication
  - Provide materials in parent's native language
  - Ensure interpreters are interpreting exactly what you are saying
- 6. Recognize that negotiation is essential in a collaborative relationship.
  - Describe the issues clearly, cite behaviors and ovoid using labels
  - Focus on common interests, not the problem
  - Invent options which are possible ideas, starting points or solutions created by the team
  - Evaluate and analyze the criteria and data
  - Choose a solution, come to a consensus that everyone can feel comfortable with
  - Develop a plan and implement solution
- 7. Bring to the relationship the mutual commitment of families, professionals, and communities to meet the needs of children with disabilities and their families.
  - Assume the other party is competent and deal with the other party honestly
  - Help parents find information, resources and services
  - Provide parents with information about the educational system
  - Continue to develop professional knowledge about different disabilities
  - Shore your knowledge with other educators
  - Connect with other state agencies and community resources

